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BETWEEN ANGELS AND BEASTS.

AUGUSTINE'S REHABILITATION OF THE *CIVITAS PEREGRINA* THROUGH AN ALTERNATIVE READING OF THE *CITY OF GOD*.

1. Introduction.

In the beginning of the *City of God* (413-427 AD), Augustine makes his task to defend «the glorious City of God against those who prefer their own gods to the Founder of that City».[1] From the very outset of the treatise, discussion of the "earthly city" appears subordinate and ancillary to discussion of the "city of God". Yet a closer reading of Augustine's metaphysics of conversion, as presented in books XII, XIV, and XIX of the *City of God*, reveals an overturning of this initial perspective.

In book XII Augustine reflects over the creation of man as the origin of the two cities, the earthly and the divine, each one arising according to the enactment of a good or evil will. Drawing an analogy between the condition of man and that of the angels in heaven, Augustine suggests that the two groups represent a perfect mirror of the human condition: as created beings, both have the power to cling onto or to refuse the original dependence from the Creator according to the freedom of their will, by which they will either enjoy immortality or live like beasts by means of pride and disobedience.

If, for ancient philosophy, a commonwealth of people is "an association of men united by a common sense of right" where "justice is the virtue that assigns everyone his due,"[2] in the *City of God* Augustine explores how this common sense comes to be

[1] Aug., *civ. Dei* 1, 1 (CCSL 47, 1). All translations in this paper are taken from St. Augustine, *City of God*, translated by Henry Bettenson, London 1972 (Penguin Books). See also the brief commentary on the *civ. Dei* by Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God: A Reader's Guide*, Oxford 1999 (Oxford Clarendon Press).

[2] Cic., *De Rep.* 2, 42 (ed. J. Zetsel, Cambridge University Press, 1999); Arist., *Eth. Nic*. 5, 5, 2 Oxford 2009 (Oxford World Classics, Oxford University Press). Cf. Aug., *civ. Dei* 2, 21 (CCSL 47, 55).

necessarily bound to the multitude's "agreement on the objects of their love."[3] The acceptance of the relation between man and his transcendental origin, incarnated in the bonds of history, places the service of God as the object of man's love. The rejection of it affirms the loving of the self, carried as far as the contempt of God.[4] Perfecting notions already explored and revisited in previous philosophical works, such as *De libero arbitrio* (387-391 AD) and *De gratia et libero arbitrio* (426 AD),[5] Augustine brings to maturity his theological thought on grace and free will by discussing their social and political impact on the creation of a just society on earth.

Analyzing the moral character of the ancient Romans, Augustine depicts them as driven by a great passion for glory, which, however, was soon transformed into a greed for praise.[6] From his observations, Augustine concludes that man always establishes a source of authority, which governs his choices, this guide being either God or any other sort of spiritual or material drive. If choice is voluntary and no efficient cause is found to direct human will to sources other than God, man has the power to decide whether to cooperate to the realization of the city of God on earth or to

[3] Aug., *civ. Dei* 19, 24 (CCSL 48, 695).
[4] Cf. Aug., *civ. Dei* 12,23 (CCSL 48, 384). See also *civ. Dei* 12, 28 (CCSL 48, 384, lines 6-12) where Augustine discusses human nature in this way: «For the human race is, more than any other species, at once social by nature and quarrelsome by perversion».
[5] In *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine argues that there exists an unavoidable tension between the perversion of the will which makes inferior things the object of its love, thus causing the separation from the truth, and Truth itself which, while constituting man's happiness, transcends him, belongs to none, and thus can only be begged for (2.11.31). However, at the end of his discussion, Augustine still maintains that the mind becomes slave of sinful desire only by its own will, since it would be impossible for such shameful condition to be induced either by something superior or equal, in which case it would be contrary to the principle of justice, or by anything beneath it, in which instance it would be impossible (3.1.2). Thus, the possession of wisdom resides entirely in the enactment of a good will. (1.12.25: *Voluntas qua appetimus recte honesteque vivere, et ad summam sapientiam pervenire*). In *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, Augustine amends his previous statements by affirming that our good life can only be possible as a state of grace that already precedes the very same disposition of the will through which it is perfected 13.25). In this light, Christ did not simply come to assist us in our conversion, but he first came to restore our human nature to justify it, as Pauline terminology would say, where both the Law of the Old Testament and the Neoplatonist idea about the nature of the soul could not. That nature of ours, lost in Adam, has been restored by the One who came 'to seek and to save what was lost.' (Lc. 19.10).
[6] Cf. Aug., *civ. Dei* 5 (CCSL 47). For a detailed discussion of the primordial sin of the Roman Empire, which wished to hear the account of God's mercy, and yet perverted the worship of God to its own glory or self-worship, see J. Cavadini, *Ideology and Solidarity in Augustine's City of God*, in *Augustine's City of God: A Critical Guide*, ed. James Wetzel, Cambridge 2012 (Cambridge University Press), 92-110.

give rise to societies driven by earthly forces, which deprive man of the awareness of his transcendental origin and redemptive promise.[7]

This Augustinian view overturns the interpretation of the *City of God* as primarily a work of sacred history. Augustine extends his discussion on existential categories, such as free will and grace, beyond the realm of philosophical and theological debate and investigates here their impact on the historical process. In this light, the focus of my analysis lies on the apparent displacement of the life of the two cities exclusively into the realm of man's inner world. I argue that a clear-cut separation between man's spiritual life and its social and public dimension does not justify a comprehensive reading of the *City of God*. In support of my thesis, I point the attention to the paradoxical conclusions that scholars have reached on Augustine's work when informed by this dichotomist view, and make use of Augustine's own text to show the social implications of Christian revelation. In communion with the Holy Church, by which man can partake in the divine life of Christ, those who are inhabitant of the earthly city can choose to form a society of men driven by the willingness to serve the city of God.

2. The *City of God* in the eyes of modern critic

The scholarship produced over the *City of God* cannot be unified under a coherent view on themes like politics and social justice. This is partly due to the conversionary character of the Augustinian narrative, which, as Benedict XVI underlines[8], is always defined by a process of self-correction that enriches and articulates its view.

[7] Cf. Aug., *civ. Dei* 12, 6 (CCSL 48)
[8] L. Coco, ed., *I Santi di Benedetto XVI*, Città del Vaticano, 2008 (Libreria Editrice Vaticana).

American humanism has no hesitation in denouncing Augustine for his inadmissible vision of the historical process.

> The attempt to derive theological-ethical values from history begins with Augustine…but, without doing injustice to his powerful intellect, we may safely say that the attempt to make the facts of history prove the truth or validity of Christian ethics is convincing only to those who are determined to be convinced beforehand.[9]

This pragmatic view, which denies any transcendental claims of reason in the knowledge of truth, has led scholarship of the 1970s-1980s to consider the *City of God* as primarily a masterpiece of sacred history, where the establishment of the Christian Empire and the repression of paganism have become part of God's saving work and are described in the categories of biblical prophecies.[10] For these scholars, it exists an unsolvable tension between contemporary history and *tempora christiana* and they view Augustine's discussion in the *City of God* dealing «not with anything that could be called an institution, but rather with persons and processes».[11] The Augustinian division of the human race into two *genera* – angels and beasts – comes to be explained in light of this 'atomistic personalism': on the one hand, «the crowds of the impious who bear the image of the earthly man», and on the other, «the succession of men dedicated to the one God».[12] The implication of such view is that the *civitas dei* carries forward a subversion of the public on behalf of a community of people more and less marginalized by their refusal of Roman imperial authority and thus capable of "replacing the world" with a bond between persons held together by a special form of

[9] M. Cohen, *Reason and Nature*, New York 1978 (Harcourt, Brace and. Company), 377.
[10] R. Markus, *Saeculum, History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, Cambridge 1970 (Cambridge University Press), 31.
[11] R. Williams, *Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the City of God*, in *Milltown Studies* 55 (1987), 55-72, there 57; see also Markus, *Saeculum*, 149-152.
[12] Cf. Aug., *De vera rel*., 27,50 (CCSL 32, 235).

love (*caritas*): «The bond of charity between people, while it is incapable of founding a public realm of its own…is admirably fit to carry a group of essentially wordless people through the world».[13] No identification of either of the two cities with any institution or with any empirically definable body of people can be reconciled with the radical dichotomy outlined by Augustine's theology of the two loves.[14] The distinction between the two cities lies, in fact, in the dimension of men's wills, in their inner response to their world and their experience. The theme of the "order of love", which runs through the *City of God*,[15] is thus associated with the inner battle of an individual's evaluation between the 'enjoyment' (*frui*) of things for their own sake or their 'use' (*uti*) for the sake of something else.[16] In this sense, «the *De civitate* is not at all a work of political theory in the usual sense, but sketches for a theological anthropology and a corporate spirituality».[17] Augustine's redefinition of the Ciceronian concept of *populus* (*iuris consensus et utilitatis communione*)[18] into a commonwealth of people united by the object of their love (*quando quidem Deo non serviens nullo modo potest iuste animus corpori aut humana ratio vitiis imperare*)[19] is viewed as the reestablishment of the correct *ordo* where the material interest (politics) is subordinated to the sovereignty of the spiritual (the soul).[20] The purpose of man under God's order is to restore the rebellious wills of human beings to some approximation of the divine *ordo*, which is also the right ordering of our internal lives, the dominance of soul over body, reason

[13] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago 1958 (University of Chicago Press), 53.
[14] C. Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, New York 1957 (New York University Press), 397.
[15] Books 15-17 describe the intertwined course of the two cities. In *civ. Dei* 15.2 Augustine interprets the allegory of the women from Gal. 4.21-5.1 as a reference to the two cities, while in *civ. Dei* 15, 22 the city of God is called "Christ's Bride" (*sponsa Christi* [CCSL 48, 488]). For a fuller discussion on the course of the two cities, in particular on book 18 and the showing up of the earthly city by contrast with its opposite, see J. Cavadini, *Spousal Vision: A Study of text and History in the Theology of Saint Augustine*, in *Augustinian Studies* 43:1/2 (2012), 127-148.
[16] Aug., *De doctr. Christ.* 1, 27, 28 (CCSL 32, 28-29).
[17] Williams, *Politics and the Soul*, 58.
[18] Aug., *civ. Dei* 2, 21 (CCSL 47, 55).
[19] Aug., *civ. Dei* 19, 21 (CCSL 48, 347).
[20] J.D. Adams, *The populus of Augustine and Jerome: a study in the patristic sense of community* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 18-22.

over passion. The Ciceronian saying *imperant enim qui consulunt*[21] becomes an imperative for spiritual nurturing where the natural order of family life is the primary locus for the exercise of such office: the household and the society become a "laboratory of the spirit" whose policy is not determined by considerations of worldly triumph.[22]

In light of this, Hannah Arendt makes Augustine the great enemy of the public realm.[23] Other scholars might not be so radical in the judgement; however, they insist in pointing out the internal dimension of Augustine's speech over the two cities.[24] To their observation, the life of the two cities is inextricably linked to the fundamental issue of what it is to be a creature animated by desire, whose prominent features are lack and hunger caused by a central and unforgettable absence. On such basis, there is no possibility of building a theory that would allow final security and 'finishedness' to any form of political life.[25]

This spiritual reading of the *City of God* terminates into a dichotomist view, which incorporates the historical approach into an exclusive eschatological narrative. On the one hand, the *City of God* is described as a revelation, «an apocalypse of the imagination, an imaginary unveiling of what will be in the end without end».[26] Augustine is seen as claiming to lift the mysterious veil of human history to pierce

[21] Aug., *civ. Dei* 19, 14.
[22] Williams, *Politics and the Soul*, 62-65.
[23] A. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago 1998 (Chicago University Press), 53: «This surprising illustration of the Christian political principle is in fact very well chosen, because the bond of charity between people, while it is incapable of founding a public realm of its own, is quite adequate to the main Christian principle of worldlessness and is admirably fit to carry a group of essentially worldless people through the world, a group of saints or a group of criminals, provided only it is understood that the world itself is doomed and that every activity in it is undertaken with the *proviso quamdiu mundus durat* ("as long as the world lasts")».
[24] Cf. J. M. Parrish, *Two Cities and Two Loves: Imitation in Augustine's Moral Psychology and Political Theory*, in *History of Political Thought*, vol. 26, n. 2 (Summer 2005), 209-235. For a discussion of modern applications on Augustine's view of the history and life of the two cities, cf. R. C. Crouse *Augustine and a 'Christendom' Two Cities*, in *Two Kingdoms & Two Cities: Mapping Theological Traditions of Church, Culture, and Civil Order*, ed. R. C. Crouse, Minneapolis 2017, 149–178.
[25] Williams, *Politics and the Soul*, 69.
[26] H. Maier, *The end of the City and the City without end: the City of God as Revelation*, in *Augustinian Studies* 30:2 (1999), 153-164, there 155.

through its bewildering opacity. History is a web of signification awaiting unveiling as the one with illumined eyes teases out its true meaning in all its spiritual richness.[27] In this kind of reading, the final three books (XX-XXII) reflect topically the narrative sequence of Revelation from chapter 18 to 22 (the identification of the two Babylon; the millennium; judgment and resurrection of the body; descent of the heavenly Jerusalem; life in the city and the beatific vision). Here Augustine is said to unveil the nature of the beatific vision of the saints in eternal felicity through the paradoxical telling of what cannot be told ("the end, without end" of 20,30). Thus, in the *City of God*, even the present «happiness is always a question of endings, an orientation toward final goods whether they be of the self or of God».[28]

On the other hand, it cannot be ignored that Augustine's narrative is widely informed by Cicero's use of Roman history, especially when he attempts to demythologize imperial ideology and eliminate the argument that it was Rome's gods who made Rome great and the Roman neglect of its own tradition in favour of new religions, such as Christianity, which caused its fall.[29] To conciliate the use of Roman historical categories with the Christian eschatological perspective, the critic sees the *City of God* as an attempt to synchronize non-biblical history with biblical events. Book XVIII is taken as reference to demonstrate that

> the scope of history in the *City of God* extends from the creation in book XI to the final judgment and the end of history in the final book of the work. Within this panorama, earthly kingdoms have a limited life span.[30]

[27] Cf. Aug., *civ. Dei* 16, 1-2; 17, 3; 20, 21.
[28] Maier, *City of God as Revelation*, 161. Cfr. *civ. Dei* 8, 3; 10, 1; 19, 1.
[29] Cf. Aug., *civ. Dei* 5, 12-19 (CCSL 47, 130)
[30] G. O'Daly, *Thinking through History: Augustine's Method in the City of God and its Ciceronian Dimension*, in *Augustinian Studies* 30:2 (1999), 45-57, there 55.

This view takes Augustine's words on the establishment of Rome's power and Empire as perfectly fitting the modern discourse about the Christianization of the Roman Empire, begun in the fourth century.[31]

> It was God's design to conquer the world through her, to unite the world into the single community of the Roman commonwealth and the Roman laws, and so to impose peace throughout its length and breadth.[32]

In this light, the historical character of the Augustinian narrative is inevitably linked to the wider eschatological scope expressed by the first view, which thus eliminates any trace of social or political autonomy from Augustine's ecclesiological discourse.

> The church proceeds on its pilgrim way in this world, in these evil days, not merely since the time of the bodily presence of Christ and of his apostles; it started with Abel himself, the first righteous man slain by an ungodly brother; and the pilgrimage goes on from that time right up to the end of history, with the persecutions of the world on one side, and on the other consolations of God.[33]

Yet, some scattered voices have pointed to the danger represented by such dichotomist views of history, as they contribute to the separation between individuals and morality and make the task of building up the earthly city through justice a utopian try of man's will.

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[31] R. McMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, New Haven and London, 1984 (Yale University Press).
[32] Aug., *civ. Dei* 18, 22 (CCSL 48, 619).
[33] Aug, *civ. Dei* 18, 51 (CCSL 48, 649).

> We cannot ignore the fact that some currents of modern culture, built upon rationalist and individualist economic principles, have cut off the concept of justice from its transcendent roots, detaching it from charity and solidarity: the 'earthly city' is promoted not merely by relationships of rights and duties, but to an even greater and more fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness, mercy and communion. Charity always manifests God's love in human relationships as well, it gives theological and salvific value to all commitment for justice in the world.[34]

What is then Augustine's position before this argued separation?

3. The fellowship of man with good or evil angels.

Book XII is situated in what scholars have identified as the second movement of Augustine's plan. [35] After devoting the first 10 books to the refutation that the Christian religion has brought about the disaster of the Roman Empire and the display of the superstitious beliefs spread around the city («we have replied to the enemies of this holy city in the previous ten books»,[36]) Augustine can now proceed to discuss the origin (books XI-XIV), the history (XV-XVIII) and the final destinations of the two cities, the earthly and the divine (XIX-XXII).

At the outset of book XII, Augustine reflects over the creation of man as the origin of the two cities and he draws a parallel with the origin and the nature of good and bad angels in the hope of demonstrating «that there is no absurdity or incongruity in asserting a fellowship between men and angels».[37] In the behaviour of these angels, in fact, we can reflect the same perversion of the will which determines man's character, with the good angels «persisting resolutely in that Good which is common to

[34] Benedict XVI, *Message for World day of Peace 2012* http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20111208_xlv-world-day-peace_en.html, point 5.
[35] O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God,* 146-147.
[36] Aug., *civ Dei* 9,1 (CCSL 47, 247).
[37] Aug., *civ Dei* 12, 1 (CCSL 48, 299).

all – which for them is God himself – and his eternity, truth, and love, while the others delighted rather with their own power, as though they themselves were their own Good».[38] The discourse about angels had begun in book XI where Augustine explained that they were created and given illumination «so as to live in wisdom and bliss».[39] Some of them, however, turned away from this illumination renouncing to the excellence of a life of wisdom and bliss, maintaining only a life of reason, which they cannot lose because of their immortality. The stress is on the fact that the angels who fought the authority of God did so not by nature but by the contrariety of the will, which led them to choose «pride in their own elevation in exchange for the true exaltation of eternity».[40] According to Augustine, also men, as created beings, have the power to cling onto or to refuse the original dependence from the Creator according to the freedom of their will, which has no power to offend God, but in so far as it turns men away from Him, their source of being, it violets their own true nature.

The only difference between holy angels and godly men lies in the form of knowledge that the two groups can attain once they choose to submit their life to God. The good angels, in fact, «do not learn about God by spoken words, but by the actual presence of the unchanging Truth, that is by his only-begotten Word, by the Father himself, and by his Holy Spirit».[41] This perfect knowledge is a God-given gift to the minds of those who are already in the contemplation of God and, for this reason, it is a knowledge founded on a degree of certainty greater than any human understanding. However, Augustine places great emphasis on the relation between angels and men, who are united by the same freedom of will, even though distinct in their possibility of the knowledge of truth.

[38] Aug., *civ Dei* 12, 1 (CCSL 48, 299).
[39] Aug., *civ Dei* 11, 11 (CCSL 48, 360)
[40] Aug., *civ Dei* 12,1 (CCSL 48, 299).
[41] Aug., *civ Dei* 11, 29 (CCSL 48).

In order to exemplify the way in which will is absent from any necessary cause to evil, Augustine provides the case of two men, of similar disposition in mind and body, who see the beauty of a woman's body. One yields and consents to it, while the other steadfastly remains still in his disposition as he had been before the vision. The same beauty was seen by the eyes of both men alike, the difference lies solely in their consent, the evil choice for which we try in vein to find the efficient cause.[42]

> The truth is that one should not try to find an efficient cause for a wrong choice. It is not a matter of efficiency, but of deficiency; the evil will itself is not effective but defective.[43]

If failure to good is voluntary, existential categories such as freedom of will, mutability of the spirits, and possibility of redemption escape spiritual and philosophical confinement, and are here deployed to show their historical and social implications. Augustine's theological discourse on social justice takes the form of a sermon, addressing real interlocutors, rather than that of a treatise, which focuses solely on man's inner disposition.

By preferring themselves to God, bad man and bad angels preferred that which has less being and so they show that

> any good will would have been impoverished, remaining in the state of longing, had it not been that he who made, out of nothing, a nature that was good and capable of enjoying Him, made it better by fulfilling that desire, first having excited it to greater eagerness for that fulfilment.[44]

Augustine fosters a conception of being as a degree of association and incorporation in the sacrifice of praise to the only one supreme and perfect being, God,

[42] Cf. Aug., *civ. Dei* 12, 6 (CCSL 48)
[43] Aug., *civ Dei* 12, 7 (CCSL 48)
[44] Aug., *civ Dei* 12, 9 (CCSL 48,

by means of the configuration of man's will to the Creator's activity. The more a man is aware of himself and his longing for the Creator, the more his act of praise fulfils him and gives him being. Therefore, man's nature stands amidst that of the good angels, on one side, and of beasts, on the other, and takes its definitive state through the enactment of a good will, by which one submit himself to his Creator,

> as to his true sovereign Lord, and observing his instructions with dutiful obedience, he should pass over into the fellowship of the angels, attaining an immortality of endless felicity, without an intervening death,

or living like a beast by means of pride and disobedience so that he «should be the slave of his desires, and destined after death for eternal punishment».[45]

While the battlefield for a correct application of the will is each man's soul, the outcome of each individual battle bears consequences on the way men interact with one another. The multitude's agreement on a common object of love reveals, in fact, that men form societies not simply on the basis of their similar nature (*naturae similitudine*), but more deeply on their feeling of kingship *(cognationis affectu*).[46]

> God foresaw that by his grace a community of godly men was to be called to adoption as his sons,[47] and these men, with their sins forgiven, were to be justified by the Holy Spirit and then to enter into fellowship with the holy angels in eternal peace.[48]

In alignment with God's plan for mankind, the *City of God* is, thus, a narrative about 'glory', but one that projects the overweening love of praise of the Romans into

[45] Aug., *civ Dei* 12, 22 (CCSL 48, 380).
[46] Aug., *civ Dei* 12, 22 (CCSL 48, 380).
[47] Cf. *Rom.* 8,15; *Gal*. 4,5.
[48] Aug., *civ Dei* 12, 23.

the glorious city of God.[49] In this way, it redeems Roman depravity and corruption, by re-establishing a secure path to glory, which accumulation of wealth and robbery towards the less fortunate had ruined. Augustine refers Sallust's words, which describe this spiritual fall:

> It was, at first, ambition rather than greed that worked on man's heart; a vice closer to a virtue. The true man and the worthless wretch alike covet glory, honour and power. But the true man directs his efforts along the right way; the man who lacks the moral qualities works towards his goal by trickery and deceit.[50]

The discussion on the transformation of the moral qualities of the Romans into wickedness, highlighted in Book V of the *City of God*, places Augustine's analysis onto an existential level that refers to the Romans as a symbol of the human race, engaged in a constant struggle (*conversio*) towards a definitive guiding principle. «Men need authority: they need to be shaken from their habits and irrational tendencies, by a firm, persuasive challenge from above».[51] If guidance does not come from God, it will come from another source.[52]

Augustine here establishes the character of a *civitas peregrina* which «is not only a narrative of another empire, a holy one, but a narrative of freedom emerging from the captivity of empire».[53] This earthly city represents the concrete realization of Cicero's noble definition on the essence of the Roman commonwealth.[54] According to this reading, Augustine sees the journey of the new *civitas peregrina* developing from

[49] P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: a biography*, Berkeley 1967 (University of California Press), 311.
[50] Sall., *Cat.* 11,1 in Aug. *civ Dei* 5,12: «Hence these men of base character, who abounded when Sallust wrote and Virgil sang these things, did not seek after honours and glory by these arts, but by treachery and deceit».
[51] Aug., *Ep.*137, 3, 12 and 138, 3, 17.
[52] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 311.
[53] Cavadini, *Spousal Vision*, 27-28.
[54] Cf. Aug., *civ. Dei* 2, 21.

history to the city of God; therefore, as a parable that begins in the 'here and now'. Such journey is not merely a spiritual one, it includes a real battle for the liberation of man from any material or worldly ideology, and attends the redemptive promise, which Augustine thus summarises:

> We also must know first our captivity, then our liberation: we must know Babylon and Jerusalem…These two cities, as a matter of historical fact, were two cities recorded in the Bible…They were founded, at precise moments, to crystallize in symbolic form, the reality of these two 'cities' that had begun in the remote past, and that will continue to the end of the world.[55]

The possibility of becoming citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem on earth is open to all men as their election to become part of this particular *civitas peregrina* does not depend on their 'similarity of nature', but rather on the way each one distinctively chooses to enact his will ('affection of kingship'). It is, therefore, the yearning of the will for the city of God, which guarantees one's own election to it.

> Now let us hear, brothers, let us hear and sing; let us pine for the City where we are citizens. By pining, we are already there; we have already cast our hope, like an anchor, on that coast. I sing of somewhere else, not of here: for I sing with my heart, not with my flesh. The citizens of Babylon hear the sound of the flesh, the Founder of Jerusalem hears the tune of our heart.[56]

Augustine's treatment of the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem echoes Sallust's identification of the true man who lives out his ambition for glory in light of the way of

[55] Aug., *Enarr. in Ps*. 64, 1 and 2. For a discussion of the confusion that reigned in "Babylon" as a figurative image of the vulnerability of mankind, see Cavadini, *Spousal Vision*, 17-18. See also, M. Cameron, *Transfiguration: Christology and the Roots of Figurative Exegesis in St. Augustine*, in *Studia Patristica* 33, ed. E. A. Livingstone, Leuven 1997, 40-47.
[56] Aug., *Enarr. in Ps*. 64, 3.

merit.[57] By connecting the Christian and the Roman ideal of the quest for true glory, Augustine seems to forge a universal call to social justice, by which any man, not just Christians, is invited to partake in the nature of this noble and everlasting city. The presence of a communal yearning among individuals of different worlds implies that man's heart longs for an experience of eternity, which has been sown in each human life, as it would be ontologically impossible to yearn for something, which does not exist. This introduces a love for the plagues of human existence that Augustine expresses in his commentary on the Psalms, where he exhorts to sing "serenades", *ad amatoria quaedam cantica*,[58] playing not on fear, but on love for a distant though existing country: the ancient city of God.

It is the reality of the city of God on earth that pushes Augustine to tackle ancient and modern dichotomist views about the relation between history and eschatology. The Platonist fundamental separation between the materiality and the immutability of existence led them to deny the divinity of Christ, as it was impossible to conceive the union of this radical dichotomy in the life of Jesus Christ. As Plato once held that lesser gods were the makers of the other living beings, being impossible for God himself to mingle with mortal forms of existence, so too Porphyry believed that the soul had to escape any form of bodily attraction to achieve purification.[59]

Refuting such statements, Augustine asks: «if our creation, although we were made mortals, is the gift of God, how can it be a punishment to return to bodies which are God's blessings»?[60] By revisiting the Plotinian sense of wonder at the sight of creation,[61] Augustine reforms his language to speak of mankind as a marvel of unity within plurality. A multitude has, in fact, been created from one individual and this is

[57] Sall., *Cat.*11, 1; 54, 6.
[58] Aug., *Enarr. in Ps.* 64, 3.
[59] Cf. Aug., *civ. Dei* 10, 29; 22,12; 22, 26-8.
[60] Aug., *civ. Dei.* 12, 27.
[61] Plot., *Enneads* 3, 2, 13 cited in Aug., *civ. Dei* 10,14.

the natural fact that should represent the most salutary warning against any disharmony: «the human race is, more than any other species, at once social by nature and quarrelsome by perversion».[62]

The dichotomy between the city of this world and the city of God does not arise in the Christian contempt for the materiality of existence and the following flight into a spiritual and eschatological realm. The type of fellowship that emerges between men is the fruit of a contingent movement of the will played out in the course of one's personal life and history, according to a narrative, as Augustine has insisted from the very first page,[63] of real and physical pilgrimage. «It is not by having flesh, which the devil does not have, but by living according to his own self, that is, according to man, that man has become like the devil».[64]

4. The uniqueness of the redemption operated by Christ

The Augustinian discourse on the will and its implications in the fabric of history cannot be separated by the event, which made eternity a moment of time. Human history was in fact nothing else than «the stretch of time in which the new born oust the dying»,[65] a great river slipping towards death, until the moment in which the language of God suddenly uncovered itself in the appearance of Christ among men, and poured meaning into at least a small part of this disquieting inanity: «The centuries of past history would have rolled by like empty jars, if Christ had not been foretold by

[62] Aug., *civ Dei* 12, 28
[63] Cf. Aug., *civ. Dei* 1. Preface (ed. Bettenson, 1): «I have taken up upon myself the task of defending the glorious City of God […]. I treat of it both as it exists in this world of time, a stranger (*peregrina*) among the ungodly, living by faith, and as it stands in the security of its everlasting seat».
[64] Aug., *civ Dei* 14, 3.
[65] Aug., *civ Dei* 16, 1.

means of them».[66] Book XIV of the *City of God* concentrates upon the repercussions of this extraordinary event:

> Now the reign of death has held mankind in such utter subjection that they would all be driven headlong into that second death, which has no ending, as their well-deserved punishment, if some were not rescued from it by the undeserved grace of God.[67]

It is in response to this unique event that, in every age, men's lives have crystallized around two basic alternatives: the members of the *civitas terrena* who tend to regard the achievement of any good in society as sufficient in itself, and those of the same *civitas* who "long" for something different, namely the reestablishment of their relationship with the Creator from whom they have fallen apart, and the commencement of the city of God on earth.[68]

> Although there are many great peoples throughout the world, living under different customs in religion and morality and distinguished by a complex variety of languages, arms, and dress, it is still true that there have come into being only two main divisions, as we may call them, in human society: and we are justified in following the lead of our Scriptures[69] and calling them two cities.[70]

The need to resolve this fundamental tension and save one's own identity as a citizen of heaven is the centre of gravity of the relationship between the two cities of this world. The theological foundations of such discourse are discussed in book XIV as

[66] Aug., *Tract. in Io.* 9,6.
[67] Aug., *civ. Dei* 14, 1.
[68] Cfr. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 318-322.
[69] Cf. *Eph.* 2,19; *Phil*. 3,20.
[70] Aug., *civ. Dei* 14, 1.

Augustine articulates his point that the cause of sin and, thus, the manifestation of every evil in this world does not arise in the flesh, but in the soul.

> Our being weighed down is not the true nature and substance of our body but its corruption; and, therefore we do not wish to be stripped of it, but to be clothed with the immortality of the body. For then there will still be a body, but it will not be corruptible, and therefore not a burden.[71]

The rehabilitation of physical reality through the event of the Incarnation guarantees liberation from the necessity to depart from the materiality of existence in order to purify the soul and achieve any spiritual or social good. Bodies are no longer the prison that Virgil depicts («Fiery is the force and celestial the source / of those seeds, to the extent they are not / by baleful bodies clogged nor by earthly limbs / and mortal members numbed»[72]), because man can freely choose the source of authority that governs his life.

> The fact is that man was created right, on condition that he should live by the standard of his Creator, not by his own, carrying out not his own will, but his creator's. Falsehood consists in not living in the way for which he was created.[73]

It is the character of the human will to determine the quality of any emotion, thus establishing the fundamental relationship that defines our life: «If the will is wrongly directed, the emotion will be wrong; if the will is right, the emotions will be not only blameless, but praiseworthy».[74] It is not the materiality of existence, but the degrees of loves, according to which our life is ordained, to give shape to the relation

[71] Aug., *civ. Dei* 14, 3.
[72] Ver., *Aen.* 6, 733-734.
[73] Aug., *civ. Dei* 14, 4.
[74] Aug., *civ. Dei* 14, 6

between God and the goods enjoyed by created beings.[75] Created things and human achievement are not to be despised as long as those members of the *civitas peregrina* maintain a firm and balance perspective on the orders of loves of which they are capable in their present state:

> I do not blame you; I do not criticize you, even if this life is what you love… You can love this life all you want, as long as you know what to choose. Let us therefore be able to choose our life, if we are capable of loving it.[76]

"*Ordinate in me caritatem*" is the hymn that the Bride of Christ, the city of God, sings in this world.[77]

The acknowledgment of such order does not come easily as we are all tempted, like the devil was, to wish no other source of goodness than ourselves.[78] Pride is the attitude which arises from an omnipotent denial of dependence, which characterizes the earthly city of each man's heart.[79] Augustine suggests that the conversion from such perverted order of love, which causes man to enjoy created things as if they were his own, can only be attained through assimilation of human love into the canons of perfect love, i.e. divine charity. The reference to the scriptural passage in *Io* 21:15-17, where Christ asks Peter if he loves Him for three times, is the *exemplum* chosen by Augustine to point to the historical revolution that took place with the Incarnation. In the first two questions, Jesus uses the word *diligere*,[80] but when He asks Peter whether or not he loved Him for the third time, he uses the word *amare* (*amas me*?). On the other hand,

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[75] Aug., *Tract. in Ep. Joh.* 2,11: «Suppose brethren, a man should make a ring for his betrothed, and she should love the ring more wholeheartedly than the betrothed who made it for her… Certainly, let her love his gift: but, if she should say, 'The ring is enough. I do not want to see his face again' what would we say of her».
[76] Aug., *Serm.* 297, 4 and 8.
[77] *Song of Songs* 2.4, in Aug., *civ. Dei* 15, 22 and 29; cf. Aug., *De doctr. Christ.* 1, 27, 28.
[78] Aug., *civ. Dei* 12, 6.
[79] Aug., *civ. Dei* 15, 7.
[80] Aug., *civ. Dei* 14, 7: "*Diligis me plus his*?".

Peter does not change the word used for replying to the triple interrogations, as he replies for three times *Domine, tu scis quia amo te*. Therefore, Augustine concludes that in scriptures there is no distinction between the sentiments of human love (*amor*) and charity (*caritas*) towards the Son of God.[81] Far from exhibiting just a sample of subtle linguistic exegesis, Augustine is again trying to undermine the Platonist tension between a correct pursuit of wisdom – which is obtained through a purifying ascent from earthly concerns – and the distractions of the body, which falls in love and remains trapped in the materiality of existence. This tension results, in fact, in a contempt for creation, which would make practically impossible the validation of the Christian message: an ordered relationship of love with the created world oriented by the gratitude towards the charitable love of the giver. On the contrary, Holy Scriptures do not make any distinction between the enjoyment of things according to their true nature (*caritas*) and the use of them according to human attachment (*amor*), as long as such human love is pursued in full awareness of its dependence. Through this, Augustine suggests a conceptual unity in which it is possible to re-articulate human *amor* in light of the divine *caritas* by means of a right application of the will.

> Thus in the earthly city its wise men who live by men's standards have pursued the goods either of the body or of their own mind or of both. Or if any of them were able to know God, they "did not honour him as God, but they dwindled into futility in their thoughts and their senseless heart was darkened."[82] In the heavenly city, on the other hand, man's only wisdom is the devotion which rightly worships the true God and looks for its reward in the fellowship of the saints, not only holy men but also holy angels, "so that God may be all in all".[83]

[81] Aug., *civ. Dei* 14, 7.
[82] *Rm.* 1, 21-23 and 25.
[83] I *Cor*. 15, 28. Cf. Aug, *civ. Dei* 14, 28 for the whole passage.

In the course of human society, Augustine identifies a group of men who are aware of the call that the love of God, manifested through the Incarnation, addresses to them. Part of a substantially different *civitas peregrina*,[84] these men are entrusted with the task of using of their life as the ground to retrieve the signs of their real heavenly citizenship. In this light, history becomes the locus of the struggle for the re-appropriation of their real value and glory as brothers of heaven, which had been stripped away from them with Adam's fall. For this reason, Peter Brown concludes his analysis of the *City of God* affirming that,

> far from being a book about flight from the world, it is a book whose recurrent theme is 'our business within this common mortal life;'[85] it is a book about being otherworldly in the world.[86]

5. The Eucharistic origin of the just society.

Book XIV maintains that it is only the mediation of Christ, in whose person the city of God is revealed, which can afford human beings to form a true commonwealth, a just society.[87] Book XIX of the *City of God* is dedicated to the description of the new just society conceived by the union between the classical idea of justice and Christian revelation. It focuses particularly on the way in which the 'Eucharistic' origin of Augustine's just society dialogues with customs and norms of the earthly city, by which it is embedded.

At the outset of the book, Augustine stresses the importance of the public dimension of the *City*: «How could that City have made its first start, how could it have advanced along its course, how could it attain its appointed goal, if the life of the saints

[84] Cf. Aug., *civ. Dei* 18, 13: *etiam ista peregrina.*
[85] Aug., *civ. Dei* 15, 21.
[86] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 324.
[87] On the transcendental nature of justice see, for example, Aug., *En. in Ps.* 61,21: *respice ergo, transcende, vade illuc ubi smel locutus est dues; et ibi inveniens fontem iustitiae, ubi est fons vitae*.

were not social»?[88] The first distinctive trait of a Christian society is the "communionality" of Christ's nature, which cures man's ignorance, and enlightens the intellect over the pretensions to justice, which the soul manufactures and to which it obsessively clings. Only through Christ's grace and companionship, the soul is enabled to heal its will, imitate Christ's example, and live rightly.[89] Augustine marks his position against the Pelagian arguments that human beings, by imitating Christ, can be fully just and avoid sin altogether.[90] The perfect unity between God and man is only found in Christ and here lies the "mystery" (*mysterium*, *sacramentum*),[91] by which human beings cannot attain any form of true communion unless they humbly acknowledge their complete dependence upon God's direct intervention into their soul.[92] This is the central theme of book XIX where Augustine articulates his theological point by way of showing its implications at the level of history and society.

Analysing the life of mortals, Augustine sees them afflicted by two kinds of deaths: the physical death of the ones we love and the spiritual death of those who have fallen from faith or moral conflict, dying in their soul and leaving us in a deep sorrow of the heart.[93] In this second case, men try in vein to restore a certain equilibrium waging wars to achieve a temporary state of peace under the dominion of some ruler:

> how could that happen, unless they [men] should consent to the peace of his [a ruler's] dictation either through love or through fear? Thus pride is a perverted imitation of God. For pride hates a

[88] Aug., *civ. Dei* 19, 5
[89] R. Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine*, Cambridge and New York 2004 (Cambridge University Press), 72-79.
[90] Cf. Aug., *civ. Dei* 19, 4.
[91] See Aug., *Ep.*, 187, 34.
[92] cf. Aug., *civ. Dei* 10, 29: *Gratia Dei non potuit gratius commendari, quam ut ipse unicus Dei Filius in se incommutabiliter manens indueretur hominem et Spiritum dilectionis suae daret hominibus homine medio, qua ad illum ab hominibus veniretur, qui tam longe erat immortalis a mortalibus incommutabilis a commutabilibus, iustus ab impiis beatus a miseris. Et quia naturaliter indidit nobis, ut beati immortalesque esse cupiamus, manens beatus suscipiensque mortalem, ut nobis tribueret quod amamus, perpetiendo docuit contemnere quod timemus*.
[93] Cf. Aug., *civ. Dei* 19, 5 and 8.

fellowship of equality under God and seeks to impose its own dominion on fellow men, in place of God's rule.[94]

Before this scenario, something revolutionary has happened: God intervened into the world, and instead of configuring Himself as yet another ruler of man's soul, He willed that man participate of His nature, which is the supreme good, thus achieving that everlasting peace he strenuously fought for. Before this incomprehensible act of self-emptiness, «human beings can only understand God's "desire" in a correct manner by believing that he wills their happiness».[95] Jesus, «though in the form of God, did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at, but emptied himself and took on the form of a servant».[96] Thus, Christ's sacrifice contains the invisible sacrifice that Christians, as members of His body, offer to God when they recognize Him as the source of their virtue. This sacrifice of praise enables man to enjoy the earthly peace in the earthly city, pledge of that fellowship with the holy angels of the Heavenly City, whose everlasting peace «is a perfectly ordered and perfectly harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God, and a mutual fellowship in God».[97] Christ's ability to take upon himself the despair of the members of his body is matched by his capacity to transfer back to his members the virtues proper of Himself. This "wondrous exchange" (*mira commutatio*)[98] creates the Augustinian model of just society: in it, all members may submit their intellect to divine direction and obey divine assistance freely, so as to walk by faith and view «all peace, of body or of soul, or of both, in relation to that peace

[94] Aug., *civ. Dei* 19,12
[95] Dodaro, *Christ and the just society*, 103; cf. Aug., *civ. Dei* 10, 6: *opera vero misericordiae non ob aliud fiant, nisi ut a miseria liberemur ac per hoc ut beati simus*.
[96] *Phil.* 2:7
[97] Cf. Aug., *civ. Dei* 19, 9-10. Here 19, 13.
[98] Cf. Aug., *En. in Ps*. 30, 2, 1, 3: "*Verumtamen quia dignatus est assumere formam serui, et in ea nos vestire se, qui non est dedignatus assumere nos in se, non est dedignatus transfigurare nos in se, et loqui verbis nostris, ut et nos loqueremur verbis ipsius. Haec enim mira commutatio facta est, et divina sunt peracta commercia, mutatio rerum celebrata in hoc mundo a negotiatore caelesti*."

which exists between mortal man and immortal God».[99] Christ's work of justification becomes the «oration of the just society, of the church (*vox ecclesiae*), whereby Christ speaks through the suffering members of his body».[100] The relation between the earthly and the heavenly city in this world is thus one of mutual awareness, in which the use of the earthly and temporal things is similar to that of a pilgrim in a foreign land. He uses them according to their natural laws, but places his hope into the eternal blessing to which Christ has destined them.

> While this Heavenly City is on pilgrimage in this world, she calls out citizens from all nations and so collects a society of aliens, speaking all languages. She takes no account of any difference in customs, laws and institutions, by which earthly peace is achieved and preserved – not that she annuls or abolishes any of those, rather, she maintains them and follows them.[101]

Approached in this way, customs, laws, and institutions do not obstacle the pledge of that perfect peace, which the holy angels enjoy in heaven, and which is gained every time that a good action is performed in relation to God and to a neighbour.

> If anyone accepts the present life in such a spirit that he uses it with the end in view of that other life on which he has set his heart with all his ardour and for which he hopes with all his confidence, such a man may without absurdity be called happy even now.[102]

For this reason, Augustine proposes an alternative definition of 'people' and 'commonwealth' where the unifying element is no longer represented by an idealistic agreement about what is 'right', an agreement unattainable among mutable beings, but

[99] Aug., *civ Dei* 19,14.
[100] Dodaro, *Christ and the just society*, 107; cf. Aug., *Ep.* 140, 18: *quid hic quaeris, humana infirmitas, vocem verbi, per quod facta sunt omnia? Audi potius vocem carnis, quae facta est inter omnia, quoniam 'verbum caro factum est et habitavi in nobis'* [*Jh* 1:14].
[101] Aug., *civ. Dei* 19, 17.
[102] Aug., *civ. Dei* 19, 20.

rather by the praise to the God who granted enlightenment of the intellect, healing of the will, and the pursuit of virtue through forgiveness of sins. Furthermore, by acknowledging the limit of human virtue, which can seek its perfection only in God, the pilgrim members of the City of God experience true justice by sharing with others the prayer for the forgiveness of sins, which

> is not effective for those whose "faith, without works, is dead",[103] but only for those whose "faith is put into action through love".[104] For such prayer is needed by righteous men because reason, even though is subjected to God, does not have complete command over the vices in this mortal state».[105]

Since human beings do not opt for virtue without a struggle against the effect of original sin, the main character of the just society, the city of God on earth, is penitential.[106]

> In this life, therefore, justice in each individual exists when God rules and man obeys, when the mind rules the body and reason governs the vices even when they rebel, either by subduing them or by resisting them, while from God himself favour is sought for good deeds and pardon for offences, and thanks are duly offered to him for benefits received.[107]

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[103] *Jas.*, 2,17.
[104] *Gal.*, 5, 6. Cf. Aug., *civ. Dei* 19, 27: *Pax autem nostra propria et hic est cum Deo per fidem et in aeternum erit cum illo per speciem. Sed hic sive illa communis sive nostra propria talis est pax, ut solacium miseriae sit potius quam beatitudinis gaudium. Ipsa quoque nostra iustitia, quamvis vera sit propter verum boni finem, ad quem refertur, tamen tanta est in hac vita, ut potius remissione peccatorum constet quam perfectione virtutum. Testis est oratio totius civitatis Dei, quae peregrinatur in terris. Per omnia quippe membra sua clamat ad Deum: 'Dimitte nobis debita nostra, sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris'* (*Mt* 6:12).
[105] Aug., *civ Dei* 19, 27.
[106] Dodaro, *Christ and the just society*, 112.
[107] Aug., *civ. Dei* 19, 27: *Hic itaque in unoquoque iustitia est, ut oboedienti Deus homini, animus corpori, ratio autem vitiis etiam repugnantibus imperet, vel subigendo vel resistendo, atque ut ab ipso Deo petatur et meritorum gratia et venia delictorum ac de acceptis bonis gratiarum actio persolvatur*.

Against the classical view by which the source of virtue is reason as it converses primarily within itself, as when it draws inspiration from moral examples,[108] Augustine sees this dialogue as a conversation with Christ. As a result, human virtue is a product of a direct, divine mediation, not of human reason alone. Through the form of an earthly pilgrimage in the footsteps of the love of Christ, virtue can indeed be known and willed until its immovable and perfected state in Heaven.[109]

6. Conclusion.

Augustine's metaphysics of conversion, displayed in books XII, XIV, and XIX of the *City of God*, presents man in his essentially relational and transcendental character, which is played out for good or for evil on the stage of world history. This connection between metaphysics and history allows for an alternative reading of the *City of God*, by which man's spiritual life and its public and social dimensions escape dichotomist views and the confinement to a purely philosophical or religious discourse. Augustine's vision of the sanctified human community extends beyond the realm of Christian rhetoric and fosters a conception of just society which is based on the free degree of association and configuration of man's will to the Creator's activity.

For Augustine, the human value of studying history emerges as he seeks to describe the community God intends to establish among men. In particular, Augustine stresses that God's community is one in which men are not called to unite according to their similar nature (*naturae similitudine*), but primarily according to their feeling of kingship *(cognationis affectu*) that may subvert the ordinary course of society. The Romans have mistakenly reduced this bondage to a self-referential attitude, which

[108] Cic., *De Rep.* 3, 28.
[109] Dodaro, *Christ and the just society*, 113.

identified the core of unity with themselves as Romans and with the boundaries of the Roman Empire, thus falling in the utopia of a real *civitas peregrina*.

Through the analysis of history, Augustine points to the introduction of a new *civitas peregrina*, whose citizens are defined by a different perception of glory, one that is not self-referential and escape deterioration into greed and lust.

In order to attain such citizenship, man needs to walk on a concrete path of conversion of his own will, which is illuminated and made possible by the wonder of the miracle of the Incarnation. To elucidate on this point, and reject once for all any insinuation that conversion might be a product of man's own disposition, Augustine terminates the *City of God* with a book dedicated to miracles as the visible expression of the way in which the agency of the human will comes to be incorporated into a broader narrative of divine intelligibility.

> God who made the visible marvels of heaven and earth, of which man is a great one, does not disdain to work visible miracles in heaven and earth, by which he arouses the soul, hitherto preoccupied with visible things, to the worship of himself, the invisible God.[110]

Augustine is particularly fascinated by those miracles that speak of God's care for the body, which will be reconstituted at the moment of resurrection, no matter in how many pieces had been torn apart.[111] Augustine believes it to be extremely important to make them well known throughout the Church as they draw a line in time with those earlier miracles read everywhere «to testify to that one supreme miracle of salvation, the miracle of Christ's ascension into heaven in the flesh in which He rose from the dead».[112]

[110] Aug., *civ. Dei* 10,12.
[111] Cf. Aug., *civ. Dei* 22, 15-16.
[112] Aug., *civ. Dei* 22, 8.

Bringing to fulfilment his theology of sign, Augustine suggests that miracles are an invitation into a new vision of reality where wonder at the sight of creation and of man constitutes the first element for a correct application of the will in charity. The great miracle of Christ's Incarnation, Resurrection and Ascension in the flesh, together with all the other instances of divine intervention into the world, reinvest men of the possibility to act in accordance with a renovated nature, performing those good works that can attain the earthly peace which is the pledge of that fellowship with the holy angels of Heaven.

> For all our good works, when they are understood as being his works, not ours, are then reckoned to us for the attainment of that Sabbath rest, in which we ourselves shall become that seventh day, when we have been replenished and restored by his blessing and his sanctification. [113]

Shaped by this new nature, man is bound to form a society that is 'eucharistically' configured by Christ's sacrificial love for His people. Consecrated as the Bride of Christ, the city of God on pilgrimage in this world becomes the first place to meet Christ in person, such is the unity of Head and Body in one conjugal flesh.[114]

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[113] Aug., *civ. Dei* 22, 30.
[114] Cf. M. Cameron, *Christ meets Me Everywhere: Augustine's Early Figurative Exegesis*, Oxford and New York 2012, vi.

ABSTRACT

This paper explores Augustine's ideal of just society, as developed in books XII, XIV and XIX of the *City of God*, and his rehabilitation of the notion of *civitas peregrina*. Bringing to maturity the classical notion of community (according to Aristotle and Cicero's definitions), Augustine investigates how, in the Christian view, the different kinds of societies, which arise on earth, are dependent on the acceptance or refusal of the relation between man and his transcendental origin. This connection between metaphysics and history allows for an alternative reading of the *City of God*, by which man's spiritual life and its public and social dimensions escape dichotomist views and the confinement to a purely philosophical or religious discourse.

KEY WORDS

community – conversion – history – justice – will – fellowship